

# What is the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians?

The International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians is a special time set aside as a global prayer meeting on behalf of persecuted Christians who stand as bold witnesses to Christ on the world's most difficult and dangerous frontier mission fields.

The earnest prayers of the global body of believers testify to the unity found only in Christ. May God inspire us as we enter into fellowship with our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters.

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

JOHN 8:12; JOHN 1:1-5, 9-13; EPHESIANS 5:8; PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15

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### Sermon Introduction

Why is light comforting to a frightened child in a pitch-black room? Nothing in the dark room wasn't present during daylight. But the absence of light stirs an innate fear within the human heart — and the only remedy is the presence of light. The same is true of spiritual darkness. Whatever spiritual darkness you are facing, Christ alone is the source of light who dispels all darkness. Christ sets biblical disciples on a course to proclaim his light in order to advance the kingdom of Christ in a dark world.

*John 8:12*

*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

When I began to think about the importance of light, my mind flashed back to a couple of scenes from the movie Castaway. I remembered a scene in which Tom Hanks character, Chuck Noland, uses a flashlight he found after he was stranded to bring him some comfort in the middle of the night.

Some time later he again needed the use of the light of this flashlight as he took shelter in a cave. But as that scene ends we see the flashlight, left on by mistake, slowly lose its light until nothing is left but darkness.

Take a look...

#### Video: Flashlight

The light brings comfort, hope, peace. Without it there is only darkness, fear, hopelessness, confusion, pain, suffering. That's what life is like for those who don't know Christ.

## Illustration: Cave In Missouri

### ILLUSTRATION

Show the video, *Sejun: Nepal*, available for free download at [vom.org/IDOP](http://vom.org/IDOP).

#### ***Alternate illustration if you are unable to show the video:***

While Buddhism is more than 2,500 years old, the teachings of Buddhism have become more prominent globally in the last 50 years. It is perceived to be a peaceful religion, but it is simply spiritual darkness.

In places like Nepal, Buddhism openly reveals itself as the blackest darkness as Buddhists work to appease spirits whom they know to be evil.

Buddhists also perpetrate the persecution of Christians in their communities. Young adults who come to faith in Christ are driven from their homes. All of this is done explicitly to appease and court favor with evil spirits we know to be demons — the fallen angels, who like their master, work only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Sejun was left at a Buddhist monastery as a preschooler, and over his nine-year stay, he experienced the darkness of Buddhism at the hands of those who supervised him. When Sejun ran away from the monastery at the age of 13, his family did not welcome him warmly. His father enrolled him in first grade, and Sejun was ashamed to be so much older than his classmates. In primary school, Sejun met a godly teacher who shared the light of Christ with him. As Sejun found new life in Christ, he boldly shared the light of Christ with his mother.

# The Source of Light

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”***

## A. “I am”

1. This is the second of seven “I am” statements Jesus makes in the gospel of John. In each of these statements, Jesus is revealing something about his identity as God’s son (the incarnate Word). The Apostle Peter’s language in 1 Peter 2:9 indicates that we who have been “called out of darkness into his marvelous light” are the ones sent.
2. If we want to know what God is like, we see a perfect representation of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
3. The “I am” language is familiar to a Jewish audience as a declaration whereby God calls his people to remember his nature and character.
  - a. God told Abram, “Fear not, Abram, **I am** your shield” (Genesis 15:1).
  - b. God told Moses, **I AM WHO I AM** (Exodus 3:14).
  - c. “...**I am** the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself” (Isaiah 44:24).

## B. “the light”

1. Light: The Greek word *phōs* [Strong’s G5457] is often used in poetic discourse, in metaphor and in parable.
2. Light is used to illuminate a path or way.
3. Light is used to reveal or discern.
4. Specifically, in John 8:12, Jesus is the light by which true life is gained.
5. Jesus declared the exclusivity of himself as **the** light. He did not declare himself as a greater among equals but exclusively as the only light by which true life is gained.

**ILLUSTRATION:** You met Sejun of Nepal in the video and were introduced to his life as a child in a Buddhist culture. Global missiologists know that over 500 million people globally (6.3% of the population of earth) are trapped in the spiritual darkness of Buddhism. They are not simply following an alternate spiritual light that may result in salvation; they are utterly lost. Of that 500 million people, more than 385 million live in areas that are considered unreached, which means that less than 2% of the population is considered Christian. Additionally, nearly 18 million people following the darkness of Buddhism live in areas on the mission frontier — areas with virtually no followers of Jesus and where pioneer cross-cultural workers are needed. Over two thousand years have passed since Jesus spoke these words: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” However, many places on our planet remain where this source of light, Christ Jesus our Lord, is not known among Buddhists. In places like Nepal, men and women, boys and girls have little to no opportunity to live in the light of Christ.



# The Force of Light

John 1:1–5, 9–13

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** (John 1:1–5).*

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, **and the world was made through him**, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. **But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:9–13).*

A. “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3, 10).

1. Christ is powerful and was present and active in every part of God’s creative work, as recorded in Genesis.
2. Think of the nuance in this concept: The light of the world created light (sun, moon and stars), and Christ fully participated in the creation of the concept of light.

B. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

1. “Overcomes” in Greek is *katalambanō* [Strong’s G2638], which means generally to lay hold of, to make one’s own, to obtain, or attain to.
  - a. In John 1:5 specifically, *katalambanō* means to “take into oneself, to appropriate.”
    - i. This connotes a truth: that darkness cannot appropriate the light for its evil intent.
    - ii. As biblical disciples, we can certainly see evil (darkness); we can even experience the evil that is a part of the reality of the fallen world in which we live. But that darkness has no hold on biblical disciples.
      - Therefore, trusting in the power of the light of Christ means biblical disciples are able to walk through the darkness of this world (refer to Psalm 23:4).

- C. *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12).
1. The force of this light of Christ is transformational in terms of the spiritual identity of those who trust him.
    - a. No longer are we “children of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5).
    - b. We are transformed as new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).
    - c. God sets us as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, holy — God’s special possession as we praise the One who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

**ILLUSTRATION:** Through faith in Christ Jesus and the bold and faithful witness of his teacher, Sejun experienced the right to become a child of God. The power of the truth of the gospel overcame the spiritual darkness of Sejun’s Buddhist experience. The spiritual darkness of Buddhism cannot overcome the light of Christ in the lives of those who hear and respond to the gospel. [Opportunity to give an illustration about the spiritual darkness that resides in every community: “Perhaps God is leading you to lead others to shine the light of Christ in a particular way as you are obedient to fulfill the Great Commission.”]

## The Course of Light

*For at one time you were darkness, **but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*** (Ephesians 5:8).

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*** (Philippians 2:14–15).

A. *“But now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8).

1. “Light” is the same Greek word as in John 8:12 (“I am the light of life”) but with the connotation of persevering in keeping it (the light of Christ).
2. Followers of Christ were first called “Christians” in Antioch (Acts 11:26). It is thought to have been a derisive term whereby they were called “little Christs.” Ephesians 5:8 transforms the mockery into encouragement to walk as “little lights” or “little Christs.”
3. The course of biblical disciples is to walk in the light of Christ, giving evidence to the light of life found only in Christ Jesus our Lord.

B. *“That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”*  
(Philippians 2:15).

1. The characteristics displayed in the lives of biblical disciples to be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish are not ends unto themselves. They are not moral imperatives in order to live without defect for the betterment of a fallen temporal world.
2. Instead, they are a way Paul gives biblical disciples an understanding of our witness and influence to “shine as lights in the world.”
3. Our ability to share the light of Christ comes from the observance (by those living in a wicked and crooked generation) that we are transformed by the same light of Christ that we declare.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Sejun’s mother risked social ostracization and, more likely, physical punishment from her family by attending Sejun’s baptism in a public forum. Evidently, however, the transformation she had seen in Sejun’s life was enough for her to inquire about Jesus. As Sejun and our other littlest persecuted Christian brothers and sisters share the light of Christ, they risk, in some cases, their lives as they do so. Let’s pause right now and pray for the children among our global family of faith who risk much to shine the light of Christ where they live — the world’s most difficult and dangerous places to follow Christ.

#### CLOSING PRAYERS FOR OUR LITTLEST CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS LIVING IN HOSTILE AREAS AND RESTRICTED NATIONS:

- Pray that they will abide in Christ as the source of their life.
- Pray that they will experience the power that comes from a life fully consecrated to Christ, and that as they sense his presence, they will continue to share the light of Christ boldly with others.
- Pray that they will endure, serving Christ faithfully for the rest of their lives despite likely paying a great price for doing so.
- Pray that you and members of your congregation will be known in your community as “little Christs” and will be inspired by Sejun and other persecuted Christians to serve Christ boldly and faithfully at any cost.